

XXXIV. *An Account of a Woman accidentally burnt to death at Coventry. By B. Wilmer, Surgeon, at Coventry. In a Letter to Mr. William Sharpe.*

S I R,

Redde, Mar. 20, 1774. **T**HE following case, which has lately engaged the attention of every one in this part of the world, appears to me so very extraordinary, that I was determined to give you a minute account of its circumstances; which will be the more agreeable to you, as you may depend upon the truth of every thing that I shall relate to you, concerning it.

MARY CLUES, of Gosford street, in this city, aged 52 years, was of an indifferent character, and much addicted to drinking. Since the death of her husband, which happened about a year and a half ago, her propensity to this vice increased to such a degree, that, as I have been informed by several of her neighbours, she has drank the quantity of four half pints of rum, undiluted with any other liquor, in a day. This practice was so familiar to her, that scarce a day has passed this last twelve-month, but she has swallowed from half a pint to a quart of rum or aniseed-water. Her health gradually declined; and,

and, from being a jolly, well-looking woman, she grew thinner, her complexion altered, and her skin became dry. About the beginning of February last, she was attacked with the jaundice, and took to her bed. Though she was now so helpless, as hardly to be able to do any thing for herself, she continued her old custom of dram-drinking, and generally smoked a pipe every night. No one lived with her in the house. Her neighbours used, in the day, frequently to come in, to see after her; and in the night, commonly, though not always, a person sat up with her; to whom she has often cried out, that she saw the devil in some part of the room, who was come to take her away.

Her bed-room was next the street, on the ground-floor, the walls of which were plaistered, and the floor made of bricks. The chimney is small, and there was a grate in it, which, from its size, could contain but a very small quantity of fire. Her bedstead stood parallel to, and at the distance of about three feet from, the chimney. The bed's head was close to the wall. On the other side the bed, opposite the chimney, was a window opening to the street. One curtain only belonged to the bed, which was hung on the side next the window, to prevent the light being troublesome. She was accustomed to lye upon her side, close to the edge of the bedstead, next the fire; and on Sunday morning, March the 1st, tumbled upon the floor, where her helpless state obliged her to lye some time, till Mary Holler, her next neighbour, came accidentally to see her. With some difficulty she got her into bed. The same night, though she was advised to it, she refused.

refused to have any one to sit up with her; and, at half past eleven, one Brooks, who was an occasional attendant, left her as well as usual, locked up her door, and went home. He had placed two bits of coal quite backward upon the fire in the grate, and put a small rush-light in a candlestick, which was set in a chair, near the head of the bed; but not on the side where the curtain was. At half after five the next morning, a smোক was observed to come out of the window in the street; and, upon breaking open the door, some flames were perceived in the room, which, with five or six buckets of water, were easily extinguished. Betwixt the bed and fireplace lay the remains of Mrs. CLUES. The legs and one thigh were untouched. Except these parts, there were not the least remains of any skin, muscles, or *viscera*. The bones of the skull, *thorax*, spine, and the upper extremities, were completely calcined, and covered with a whitish efflorescence. The skull lay near the head of the bed, the legs toward the bottom, and the spine in a curved direction, so that she appeared to have been burnt on her right side, with her back next the grate. The right *femur* was separated from the *acetabulum* of the *ischium*; the left was also separated, and broken off about three inches below the great *trochanter*. The connection of the *sacrum* with the *ossa innominata*, and the inferior *vertebræ* of the loins were destroyed. The intervening ligaments kept the *vertebræ* of the loins, back, and neck together, and the skull was still resting upon the *atlas*. When the flames were extinguished, it appeared that very little damage had been done to the furniture of the room; and that the side of the bed next the fire had

had suffered most. The bedstead was superficially burnt; but the feather-bed, sheets, blankets, &c. were not destroyed. The curtain on the other side the bed was untouched, and a deal door, near the bed, not in the least injured. I was in the room about two hours after the mischief was discovered. I observed, that the walls and every thing in the room were coloured black: there was a very disagreeable vapor; but I did not observe, that any thing was much burnt, except Mrs. CLUES; whose remains I saw in the state I have just described. I took away one of the bones (the remains of the *sacrum*) which you have inclosed with this letter. The only way that I can account for it is, by supposing that she again tumbled out of bed on Monday morning, and that her shift was set fire to, either by the candle from the chair, or a coal falling from the grate. That her solids and fluids were rendered inflammable, by the immense quantity of spirituous liquors she had drank; and that when she was set fire to, she was probably soon reduced to ashes, for the room suffered very little.

Coventry,
April 9, 1772.

B. WILMER.

Received